

News Release

Senator Pete V. Domenici

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DOMENICI SEEKS \$12 MILLION FOR FEDERAL DRUG CASE PROSECUTIONS ALONG U.S.- MEXICO BORDER

Senator Says New Mexico Counties Would Receive \$3 Million

WASHINGTON -- In an effort to address a law enforcement emergency cropping up all along the U.S.-Mexico border, Senator Pete Domenici today reported that he is seeking \$12 million in emergency funding to reimburse counties in the four border states for the costs of prosecuting federal drug cases.

Domenici, a Senate Appropriations Committee member, is seeking the funding through an emergency supplemental spending package moving through Congress. Under the plan, the funding would be divided evenly between the states, with New Mexico, Arizona, California and Texas each receiving \$3 million.

The funds would go directly to county and city governments to reimburse them for court costs, county and district attorney costs, criminal proceedings expenditures, and indigent defense.

"Recent dramatic increases in drug smuggling across the U.S.-Mexico border, coupled with increased apprehension rates by the U.S. Border Patrol, DEA, and Customs Service, have led to a steep rise in the volume of federal drug cases," Domenici said. "Our cash-strapped border communities are covering costs of many of these federal drug prosecutions that our U.S. Attorneys have asked them handle. The federal government has an obligation to provide restitution."

"I am concerned that communities along the border, some of the poorest in the United States, are paying heavy costs associated with illegal immigration, drug and alien smuggling. These funds would just begin to reimburse our state for the costs it has incurred. I will continue to work for a longer-term solution beyond this stopgap emergency measure," he said.

Domenici requested the funding in a letter to Sen. Ted Stevens, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Joining Domenici in requesting the funding were border state Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas), and Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.)

In another effort to address exploding caseloads in courts along the border, Domenici last week cosponsored the **Southwest Border Judgeship Act of 2000**. The legislation would provide eight permanent and five temporary judgeships for border federal courts in Arizona, California, New Mexico and Texas. New Mexico would receive two judges, one permanent and one temporary.

In New Mexico, the Las Cruces federal court now handles 65 percent of the federal criminal cases in the state, but it has no sitting federal judge. Magistrates and a senior judge handle the entire caseload.

The five U.S. district courts to receive the 13 extra judges handle 26 percent of all criminal cases in the United States. The remaining 74 percent of federal criminal filings are divided among 89 other district courts. Between 1994 and 1998, criminal filings in these five courts increased from 6,460 to 14,517. The average caseload per judge in these courts is four times the national average.

Domenici, Senate Budget Committee chairman, also serves on the Commerce, Justice, State and the Judiciary (CJS) Subcommittee that provides funding for U.S. Justice Department activities, including the U.S. District Courts.